

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Dissertations, Theses, and Student Research:
Department of English

English, Department of

4-2016

Dreaming Free From the Chains: Teaching the Rhetorical Sovereignty of Gerald Vizenor Through *Bearheart*

Lydia R. Presley

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishdiss>



Part of the [Ethnic Studies Commons](#), and the [Literature in English, North America, Ethnic and Cultural Minority Commons](#)

Presley, Lydia R., "Dreaming Free From the Chains: Teaching the Rhetorical Sovereignty of Gerald Vizenor Through *Bearheart* " (2016). *Dissertations, Theses, and Student Research: Department of English*. 113.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishdiss/113>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Student Research: Department of English by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

DREAMING FREE FROM THE CHAINS:
TEACHING THE RHETORICAL SOVEREIGNTY OF GERALD VIZENOR
THROUGH *BEARHEART*

by

Lydia R. Presley

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: English

Under the Supervision of Professor Thomas Gannon
Lincoln, Nebraska

April, 2016

DREAMING FREE FROM THE CHAINS:
TEACHING THE RHETORICAL SOVEREIGNTY OF GERALD VIZENOR
THROUGH *BEARHEART*

Lydia R. Presley, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2016

Advisor: Thomas Gannon

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Gerald Vizenor's novel *Bearheart*, through the lens of rhetorical sovereignty. What this means is that the crux of my understanding of *Bearheart* begins with the knowledge that the language, terminology, and style used by Vizenor are not only his choices, but also his inherent Native right to use. I argue that it is important to teach Vizenor's theoretical ideas through *Bearheart* because each of its relatively short episodes, or series of episodes, deals with a key theoretical idea that can be explored not only in a Native American literature setting, but in a variety of literature classrooms. Vizenor's writing uses what Kimberly Blaeser calls a "rhetoric of process," which allows Vizenor to educate his audience by using his characters as teachers and modelers. I point out moments where this process takes place, as Vizenor guides his readers through his difficult theoretical concepts. I even argue that, in denying Vizenor a place in the classroom, we participate in silencing the rich cultural hybridity of his language. By shifting the lens away from the conventional trickster critical readings and looking at Vizenor's text through the lens of rhetorical sovereignty, this essay uncovers a wealth of critical commentary on the most pressing ecological and social crises of today. The first part of this thesis makes the argument for teaching

Vizenor and *Bearheart*. In the second part of the thesis, I examine sections of *Bearheart* using Rob Nixon's theory of "slow violence" as one example of the ways in which the novel can be taught outside of the Native American literature classroom.

I think literature ought to engage, upset, confront, disrupt,
 liberate people from their reading habits which reflect their
 worldview and compulsive behavior, inhibitions, . . .
 religion, whatever, as the great life, as civilization. They
 ought to be tested, disrupted, and confronted.

—Gerald Vizenor

The Relevance of *Bearheart* for the 21st-Century Learner

It is mid-morning, late in the semester in a college classroom, and those in attendance, half undergraduate and half graduate level, are preparing to begin a discussion on their latest assigned reading. The author of the assigned reading, Gerald Vizenor, is unlike the authors read previously in the class, and the students are given a handout identifying key terms in the text before discussion can even begin. Their professor spends ten to fifteen minutes going over the handout, defining terms like “crossblood,” “manifest manners,” and “terminal creeds.” The students, unless they have a strong foundation in Native American literature, are more than likely hearing these terms for the first time. Arguably, this portion of the class schedule depends on a solid grasp of Vizenor’s writing style and terms, so the time taken to learn how to interpret the style and define the various terms Vizenor chooses to use is well spent. This is, in large part, due to the difficult and sometimes seemingly unapproachable manner in which Vizenor communicates his message. Without that preparation the students are denied the rich rhetorical strategies that are present in Vizenor’s texts. These strategies are important because they enable us to examine Vizenor’s texts in a manner that he originally

intended: a hybrid blending of colonialist language and native literary sovereignty informed by the individual tribe of the author. Some confusion is necessary because it pushes the reader to examine their preconceived ideas of what language and, even further, Native literature is. This means that the task of teaching this complicated discourse falls heavily on the shoulders of the teacher and the student must willingly undertake the task of learning to understand and interpret the language. However, when both teacher and student take up those tasks, it is my experience that the result is a richly rewarding one.

Making Space for Rhetorical Sovereignty

In spite of its difficulty, Vizenor's writing challenges and forces the reader into a broader and more complex way of thinking about Native American literature. He does this by claiming "rhetorical sovereignty" throughout his writing. By rhetorical sovereignty, I refer to contemporary definition put forth by Scott Lyons, who defines it as "the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse" (449-450). Lyons argues this means that teaching rhetorical sovereignty "requires a rethinking of how and what we teach as the written word at all levels of schooling" (450). *Bearheart*, being Vizenor's first novel, is prime for study through the lens of rhetorical sovereignty as it is the first instance of Vizenor exerting, through a larger piece of fiction, his specific hybrid blend of language in a story that exists both in shorter episodes of violence and in the broader scope of a journey. Noted Vizenor scholar, Kimberly Blaeser also writes of the rhetorical sovereignty in

Vizenor's works: the "destiny of the American Indian rests with language. The Indian will survive or will 'vanish' through the merits of language: survive through oral tradition, or be made to vanish through popular, scientific, literary, and political rhetoric" (39). Vizenor exerts his rhetorical sovereignty by attempting "to break down what he sees as civilized illusions with uncivilized language, to state what good taste dictates should not be stated, partly to force a recognition of our own basic energies" (185). While the argument could be made for teaching rhetorical sovereignty with the works of other Native authors who write using more conventional rhetoric, I think Vizenor's explosive and unusual combination of style and subject matter makes his works ideal for introducing rhetorical sovereignty in the literature classroom.

Vizenor is not the only author to be doing this; yet, arguably, Vizenor's style makes his writing stand out as being something that uniquely asserts its rhetorical sovereignty in Native American Studies. This is important for a few different reasons. In the Native American literature classroom, it introduces an open and thorough discussion of sovereignty, from what it means to tribes, both in history as well as contemporary society, to a discussion of the way the English language and writing has been taught to the Native Americans. This means tackling the erosion of language as it applies to "treaty" moving to "agreement," "sovereignty" to "ward," and "nation" to "tribe" (Lyons 453). It means looking at the way language was taught, both spoken and written, to the Native American children ripped from their homes and placed into boarding schools and how that pattern continues today through the violence being performed under the headings of social services, poverty, and alcoholism. Teaching Vizenor's rhetorical moves also sets the stage for reducing resistance from the students themselves by

acknowledging that the writers have a right to their own story and that the story being told is worthy of being considered rather than critiqued for being something too different. Additionally, in literature classes that are outside the realm of Ethnic Studies, teaching Vizenor allows not only for these same conversations to take place, but makes space for them to take place. It not only provides Vizenor's rhetorical sovereignty a chance in the spotlight, but in directing that spotlight on rhetorical sovereignty, we establish the ethos of Vizenor's strategies as just as important as Native literary criticism that relies upon the trickster and other traditional theories taught in the Native American classroom.

Examples of Rhetorical Strategy

In his own rhetorical sovereignty agenda, Vizenor's writing includes rhetorical strategies that push back at the European-centered, colonialist writing that is taught traditionally. In this way, Vizenor writes literature of *survivance*. Vizenor defines survivance as "unmistakable in native stories, natural reason, remembrance, traditions, and customs and is clearly observable in narrative resistance and personal attributes, such as the native humanistic tease, vital irony, spirit, cast of mind, and moral courage" ("Aesthetics" 1). By "literature of *survivance*" I mean literature that performs rhetorical sovereignty by demonstrating the survival and resistance of Native peoples. For example, this means that, instead of adopting the colonialist definition of "manifest destiny" for use in his writing, Vizenor appropriates the term to describe the lingering effects today that were influenced by that doctrine. By changing manifest destiny to "manifest manners," Vizenor challenges the idea of a specific destiny connected with the settlement of the United States, thus claiming sovereignty over the term. Manifest manners, he explains, is

“that felicitous vernacular of political names and sentimental neocolonial destinies” that make up the language and literature of racial colonialism or, to put it in different words, the romanticized language used to discuss the remnants of and the privileges derived from colonial violence of racialized settlement. The language Vizenor is addressing can reference, for example, nicknames bestowed on the tribe members in a trickster fashion whose meaning was banished when the nicknames became the “legal” surname of the individual through governmental intervention (“Manifest Manners” 224-225).

Additionally, it is the language used to discuss the remnants of colonial violence ties into commonly held misconceptions and stereotypes, such as the vanishing, savage, or ecological Indian. Rather than addressing the underlying problems associated with these portrayals, the colonial language strips them of their importance and deliberately misdirects the problems until only a ghost of the issue remains. “Manifest manners” is above all a discourse that justifies colonialism. It tackles the idea that whatever problems exist with the Native peoples are due to the actions of that same population. The use of “manifest manners” points out the ties that these problems have with manifest destiny and places the responsibility for those issues back where it ultimately belongs: with those who set out to fulfill the goals of manifest destiny and those who continue, to base their actions/laws/words in that doctrine.

The Trouble with *Bearheart*

The difficulty of the text and layering of metaphors and allegorical references are not the only things that come to light when studying Vizenor’s writing. The sample text I have chosen to discuss in this thesis is Vizenor’s first novel, *Bearheart*. Vizenor created

in *Bearheart* a trickster tale that asserts rhetorical sovereignty in every episode through a challenging of what Vizenor calls “terminal creeds,” while also teasing the audience with stories touching on bestiality, extreme violence, and trickster dick narratives. Terminal creeds, or “beliefs that seek to impose static definitions upon the world,” form the basis for some of the harshest reactions against *Bearheart* (Owens 249). While researching for this thesis, I found that I needed to know more about the potential consequences, if any, there would be in introducing *Bearheart* to the undergraduate classroom.

In October 2015, I spent some time interviewing Vizenor. During that interview, he told me the story of a time he lectured on *Bearheart* for a friend’s class just after it had been published. Vizenor’s friend taught both Native and American literature in a community college in Minneapolis. She had not yet read the book and, as Vizenor laughingly joked, “you know where this is going.” He recalled that, after she had read the book, she told him she “practically fainted” and then called him in “absolute terror.” When he spoke to her, she said something along the lines of “Gerald, why didn’t you tell me it was this kind of book?” He told her he didn’t tell her to read the book and certainly not to assign it, but he still agreed to come and lecture on the book, at her request, because she was “desperate and thought she might lose her job.”

Vizenor went on to describe arriving at the school to speak, where he said that the tension from the students was so thick that he found the room by the “heat coming out of it” – a bit of an exaggeration, he admits, but the point is made. He *knew* where the room was located. He said of the classroom atmosphere that it was “hateful” and that he had “never seen so much hatred for the source of a literary work.” So, in order to refocus the class, he raised his hand and opened with a question. “Please,” he said, “I just want to ask

just one question and then you can have at me for an hour. Is there anything in this novel that you haven't already read in a newspaper?" The students responded by quarrelling with him, and he clarified with the following: "You know what I mean, if a newspaper told the full story, they would have told this novel." This method of interacting with the class worked, according to Vizenor. The students were able to shift their anger from him and toward the textual violence in the book. More importantly, this story illustrates the reception of this novel upon its release in 1978.

Vizenor said the students began to focus their anger at the content of the scenes they were reading and the violence that was being portrayed. This change of focus from the anger at the "literary source" that created the actual text (i.e. the language being used) to the message that text is attempting to portray is an important movement for students to make when studying *Bearheart*. It is easy to be caught up by the dramatic, confusing, and trickster-like rhetoric that depict the violence and, in the process, neglect to dive deep into the actual issues being interacted with through that rhetoric. Those issues are hot-button ones that are actively reported in the news today, such as racial tensions, the excesses of capitalism, the defense of perceived constitutional rights and the "American Dream," the tensions today in connection to big oil business, and the crisis happening with fracking and the politics of various pipelines. Yet Vizenor, in teaching his text to the classroom that day, illustrated a valuable lesson for those of us looking to teach *Bearheart* in the current-day classroom.

Vizenor was not the only person having issues in the classroom with *Bearheart*. Native Studies scholar and writer Louis Owens stresses that teaching *Bearheart* is not just risky, it is "dangerous" (247). He recalls that three students in an American Indian

fiction course reported him to a dean due to the inclusion of *Bearheart* on his syllabus (247). He is careful to emphasize that these students, “all mixedblood women raised in southern California,” knew how to respond to the “familiar tragedies of Indians” in the text, yet they were upset by the challenge presented to their own terminal creeds; beliefs that were present thanks to the weaning of these students on “Hollywooden Indians” (247-248). It is important here to note that the students were not offended by the actual acts that were being portrayed in the book. Rather, the offense was taken when the students had to consider that these were portrayals of Indians that were not in keeping with their “Indian” identities that had been shaped by individuals such as James Fenimore Cooper and John Wayne (248). Owen rightfully points out that the challenge that *Bearheart* presents to these pre-fabricated identities is exactly what a trickster novel should be doing (248). He writes the “trickster tests definitions of self and concomitantly, the world defined in relation to that self,” and that this is exactly what Vizenor means when he says, “some upsetting is necessary” (247-248).

Bearheart was not just upsetting to students in 1978. Even before its publication, the manuscript of *Bearheart* went through three publishers, according to Vizenor, before finally finding a home (247). In my interview with him, Vizenor told me the following story about the publishing process:

At the time, Terry Cochran—he was senior editor at the University of Minnesota Press—had a standing contract with a printer in Iowa who did almost all their books – long-term contract to set type and print books. When they got *Bearheart*, the owner of the company called Cochran and said we can’t continue on this book. My typesetters got part of the way

into it and refused to work. So Cochran explained to him formally, in his letters, we have a contract; either produce the book or breach the contract. He said, I'll breach the contract. I will not print this book. So he gave up future contracts. So Minnesota went to a different publisher, which was beneficial because there was a rising, much lower-cost, typesetter in Michigan, so they ended up doing much better in the long-term by leaving Iowa.

This story serves to further illustrate how controversial this novel was for its time.

Bearheart's text challenged those who chose to teach it, students assigned to read it, and typesetters who were so upset by what they were seeing that a contract was broken and further business lost.

Teaching *Bearheart*

Louis Owens introduces us to one of the pivotal methods through which *Bearheart* is traditionally examined in the 1990 edition of the novel. In his afterward, Owens focuses on the “trickster narrative” and the “post-apocalyptic” allegorical nature of the book (248). This focus on a “trickster narrative” means that the text is studied with that particular lens in mind and, in this case, can be to the detriment of the violence that is contained in the book. For example, scholar Zubeda Jalalzai has examined *Bearheart* in the context of a “trickster text” by applying Native trickster theory to the character of Bigfoot in the novel (4). In another pivotal essay on *Bearheart*, Maureen Keady suggests that Vizenor acts as the trickster/teacher by both “degrading words and using them to violate and degrade” (62). Finally, Elizabeth Blaire discusses the ways in which the 1978

version of *Bearheart* is a “tale-within-the-tale” (78). She points that while the 1978 edition *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* is authored by Gerald Vizenor, the title page is “supposedly authored by Bearheart himself” (78). In this way, *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* becomes “the title of the novel and the title of the section of the ‘novel’ that introduces the novel-within-the-novel, *Cedarfair Circus: Grave reports from the Cultural Word Wars*” (78). Yet, when Vizenor chose to republish the novel in 1990, Blair points out the changes in the book from its first published edition in 1978 and the second edition. Drawing on the example from the 1978 edition that I have just given, the change centers on the title. *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* becomes *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* and Blair notes that while the original title “emphasizes the fictional author” the new title, instead, “underlines the continuity of the Native American struggle” (82). This just one of the examples that Blair presents in her argument of the manner through which Vizenor is engaging with the trickster, for while the text certainly contains heavy themes of tricksterism, the author also acted as a trickster when making decisions on the presentation of the story in both editions of the book.

These scholars, among others, have studied with great success the methods used in writing *Bearheart*. But, while the trickster methodology is extremely important and vital to the study of Native American literatures, it has become so a common theme among the critical essays that it limits, and potentially stifles, other readings of the text and, arguably, influences future critical examinations of the novel. This means that one of the core tenets of what Vizenor was speaking of in the classroom that day in 1978 is shrouded behind a continual projection of the trickster scaffolding.

In the earlier story about lecturing on *Bearheart* for his friend, Vizenor drew the students' attention away from the explicit descriptions contained within the book by pointing out that everything in the novel is violence and that violence is all around each person in that room. The newspapers report it, he stressed, but what they don't report is how and why the violence is being reported. This how and why is where the importance of teaching *Bearheart* comes in, because the novel does not balk in addressing those questions and directly tackles the political undercurrents that the newspapers shy away from reporting. That, according to Vizenor, is where the real knowledge is. He emphasized that real knowledge is "not in the statistics, not in the numbers, not in the victimry. It's in the actual description of the experience." Victimry is the active engagement of an individual in the experience of being a victim; it is the emotional, spiritual, and physical method through which that person allows their circumstances and others' actions to directly affect their lives and prevent them from surviving in any sort of meaningful way. It is through recognizing the occurrences of victimry and then putting those occurrences aside to deal with the larger issue surrounding it real knowledge will begin to occur.

After carefully considering Vizenor's story of teaching *Bearheart* in the classroom, I determined that it is important to separate *Bearheart* from the traditional analysis of a trickster novel or a satirical novel (Blair 79). This does not mean that I cannot acknowledge the importance of the novel as a trickster text, but that I argue that being a trickster text is only part of *Bearheart's* legacy in critical Native studies. The essays I mentioned previously are among several insightful criticisms of *Bearheart*. Yet, in spite of their insightfulness, they can all be placed under the same heading of criticism:

trickster theory. Typically, trickster theory is viewed in two different ways: first, it works to identify the trickster/tricksterism in literature, and second it refers to the trickster *as* the literary critic. These essays, like *Bearheart*, are thus confined specifically to the Native American literature classroom and, even further, to the section of the class devoted to the trickster. It is my argument that *Bearheart*, and even trickster theory itself, can and should be taught both outside as well as inside the Native American literature classroom. It can work in conjunction with a variety of issues, including biopolitics, ecocriticism, and social and environmental justice. Even further, the addition of *Bearheart* to an American Literature course, a science fiction/dystopian course, or even a course that deals specifically with experimental writing would be beneficial for the course as a whole as it would introduce the class to a voice and style that has previously been confined to the Native American literature classroom.

Statement of Purpose

In this thesis, I intend to not only argue that *Bearheart* is a valuable text outside of the lens of trickster theory, but also to present the ways the lens of rhetorical sovereignty expands the value of the text. While this means that I will be engaging with the violence contained in *Bearheart*, my discussion of that violence will not set out to justify Vizenor's writing of *Bearheart* through a defense of his writing style and material. Rather, as Vizenor opened the class that day, my focus will be on the actual violence portrayed in the text and how Vizenor's rhetoric exhibits sovereignty in that portrayal. I will do this in two ways. First, *Bearheart* will be examined first through Vizenor's own "rhetoric of process" and how this process works to challenge pre-conceived notions of

what being “Indian” is. Second, *Bearheart* lends itself well to being examined through the lens of ecocriticism. I will be using Rob Nixon’s theory of “slow violence,” from his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, to examine the actual violence taking place in *Bearheart*. At the same time I will refer back to the layering of rhetorical sovereignty being used by Vizenor in writing about that violence. I intend to draw attention to the actual violence that occurs to Proud Cedarfair and Rosina through an application of those strategies as one example of teaching *Bearheart* through theoretical discussion that is not limited to trickster theory.

The Rhetoric of Process

During my interview, Vizenor gave me some direction in how to approach the text in our modern day. He spoke of how *Bearheart* came into being, saying he had raised the question to friends and students on whether there would be an American culture without petroleum. He said they struggled with that question because “not one of them was capable of giving up petroleum.” In her thorough and insightful study of Vizenor’s writing, Kimberly Blaeser discusses the way Vizenor teaches us how to read the text through his “rhetoric of process” (179). Blaeser writes that Vizenor recognizes his dilemma and understands that he needs to “educate his audience so [he] can write for them” (179). Essentially, Vizenor understands that his kind of literature, “trickster fiction” does not exist and, as such, he needs to teach his audience what he is doing so that he can do it (179). This rhetoric of process is important because it allows the reader to engage with the text without needing to know or understand everything about the complicated writing style that Vizenor engages in. Enough can be drawn from the context

of each episode to allow the reader a basic understanding of what is happening. For example, in “Hlastic Haces and Scolioma Moths,” Vizenor continues the journey of the circus pilgrims and, rather than rely on the show versus tell model, he combines showing through his own narration and telling his reader what is being seen through the voice of Belladonna, one of the travelers (145). Vizenor describes the travelers as being surrounded by “cripples” with “vulpine smiles” who are “dressed in strange clothing of phantoms and angels and dreams” (145). Belladonna puts it into words, describing the cripples as “incomplete animals lusting for our whole bodies” (145). Little Big Mouse, another traveler, draws attention to their sadness and loneliness, to which Belladonna points out that “evil follows the deformed” (145). This episode is intended to highlight the damage done to animals, humans included, and to the environment through the actions of chemical manufacturers. Vizenor’s characters ask the questions the reader would ask. One exchange goes as follows:

“You have a quilt like mine,” said Little Big Mouse, pointing toward the hand prints on the dream shawl over the shoulder of the cripple whose plastic arms dangled like broken tails as she passed.

“What happened to your old arms?”

“Lost them in a rain storm.”

“Rain storm?” questioned Little Big Mouse.

“Nose gone too under poison rains.”

“Rotten poison rain,” said Little Big Mouse. (146)

In this short scene Vizenor takes care, amidst the dialogue, to describe the presence of plastic arms. It would be safe to assume that, given the information contained in the

exchange, the reader could draw conclusions as to happened to the woman with the shawl. Instead, Vizenor asks the questions in logical order. First, what happened to the flesh and blood arms of the traveler and then what rainstorm? Vizenor narrates and his characters teach.

The direction provided to me through Vizenor's retelling of the inspiration that lead to *Bearheart* enabled me to begin to see each episode in the book as a journey through the process that Vizenor went through in trying to find the answer to the pivotal question: what becomes of the American culture without petroleum?

Creating the Ethos for a Rhetoric of Process

One of the most important things Vizenor does with his writing is challenge our pre-conceived notions about ourselves, the world around us, and our relationship to that world. This is intentional, as Vizenor wants his readers to “reimagine moment by moment the world we inhabit” (Owens 248). He does this by telling the story of people through several generations who were good humans; by good humans Vizenor simply means that they had the necessary ethos to govern. These are not comical two-dimensional characters; rather, Vizenor creates a plethora of characters that provide his reader with a colorful, broad picture of what a journey from the north to the American southwest might look like. Vizenor said, in speaking of these characters and the journey they were on, that he tried to “take the journey, himself, with the characters” (Personal Interview). This manner of writing harkens back to that rhetoric of process. Vizenor asked a question to his friends and students and, seeing that they could not answer him, he decided to embark on the journey to finding the answer through the writing of

Bearheart. This means that, in the process, the Vizenor who wrote the novel walks hand in hand with his readers in learning on this journey and, also, that he experiences the violence in a way that is just as deeply disturbing to him, as a writer, as it might be to his reader. He spoke briefly of this in our interview, retelling a story I had read previously, and in doing so, he emphasized the impact that the text had on his own psyche. Vizenor says of his time writing *Bearheart*:

I developed this psychological fear of walking home at night in the dark. It was quite disturbing. In the city, you know, we were cautious anyway, but I was really having difficulty because of the themes and subjects I had been working with. It was really affecting my psychological sense of well-being. So I decided to conquer it in this way: I walked in the most dangerous places in the city I could imagine to overcome, and I finally did. What I realized was I had to act like I wasn't concerned about this. And it was only later, maybe ten years later, when I read some incredible psychological research on how people unconsciously act like victims because they are showing their fear. In *Bearheart*, there are humans, native humans with an ethos of governance, finding a way to survive and they're passing through the savages of a once civilized petroleum world and that's the parallel, of course, to the white people going East to West, commenting on the savages.

It is important for Vizenor to confront those fears and to overcome the sense of victimry and exhibit survivance instead. Vizenor defines survivance as “a native sense of presence, the motion of sovereignty and the will to resist dominance. *Survivance* is not

just survival but also resistance, not heroic or tragic, but the tease of tradition, and my sense of survivance outwits dominance and victimry” (93). In contrast, victimry is the succumbing of the individual to the fear taught and the stereotypes that are reinforced through media, literature, and other places where the colonized Indian is portrayed.

While *Bearheart* contains characters that exhibit survivance as well as victimry, it is Vizenor’s intention throughout the novel to model for his readers what the varying stages of movement from survivance to victimry, and vice versa, looks like through the actions of the his characters.

Introducing *Survivance* and *Victimry* in *Bearheart*

Vizenor starts his story by pitting survivance and victimry against one another. He introduces us to two characters: a woman connected to the American Indian Movement (AIM)—a group of individuals that consists of those who are merely “mouth warriors”—and an “old white bastard” who hides away in the basement of an old building, buried with the “Heirship documents” (xi-xiii). The woman confronting the bear in the basement of an old Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) building represents the modern clash between those mouth warriors, the “warrior with chickens,” and the Native peoples who not only exhibit survivance, but also call out instances of victimry and the adoption of terminal creeds (x). Immediately the struggle between the “Hollywood Indian” and the Bear is brought into the forefront – a struggle that will be addressed again and again throughout the novel. It is this struggle that first introduces rhetorical sovereignty to the reader. We are presented with phrases like “terminal creeds,” “trickster liberation,” “word bear” and “word pile,” and “crossblood” (ix-xiv). Vizenor’s

introduction of these words in this opening part of the book comes across as deliberate—a move intended to jolt his readers from their complacent place of thinking of Native peoples as peoples who have bought into the colonial definition of “Indianness.” There is no permission given here; rather, he is reclaiming recognition of the power that he has to write and speak as a Native author and to do that writing and speaking in a manner that he deems most fit to convey his message. In doing this, Vizenor exposes his audience to the issues facing Native communities today and his own method of writing and speaking about those issues.

Vizenor also takes on AIM, attacking the group that had, just five years before the publication of *Bearheart* in 1978, been prominent in the news with their takeover of Wounded Knee. In doing so, he potentially alienates those people who supported AIM in their efforts before, during, and after the occupation of Wounded Knee. The images portrayed by corporate media during that occupation show Native men dressing and acting as the media expected Native peoples to dress and act. They adopted and played into the idea of being Indian, which is an issue Philip Deloria talks about in his book, *Playing Indian*. During the Wounded Knee occupation, the “nineteenth-century savage” Indian had become the “authentic twentieth-century victim and critic” Indian (152). By doing so, the protestors appealed to those “white radicals” who placed a “premium upon a detached, symbolic Indianness” (163). This sort of “symbolic Indianness” is what Vizenor means by labeling the AIM warriors as “mouth warriors.” In doing so, the narrator in this first portion of *Bearheart* is able to push back against the female representation of AIM and call her out for her playing the symbolic Indian.

This direct attack on the colonial-influenced construction of Native Americans is important in two ways. First, it directly challenges the pre-conceived notions of identity, for both Native and non-Native students alike. This is especially important because it allows space in the classroom for Native students to hear and see a different representation than that which is presented to them from a literature that is seems characterized by “savage attacks: rape, pillage, murder, and captives” (Interview). That literature presents a “romantic, still—warrior, but also and always the victim” hero and is written by non-Native authors about Native peoples (Interview).

Example of Analysis: Slow Violence through the Removal of the Surplus People

It can be argued that, in today’s age of constant news broadcasts and the seeking out of the next and bigger story, it is difficult to hold the attention of a western audience in general. We are, essentially, in a “digital world that threatens to ‘info-whelm’ us into a state of perpetual distraction” (Nixon 12). Yet underneath that constant chatter of news and gossip, change is happening in the world through movements so slow and quiet that they struggle to find a place in the spotlight. What these movements are struggling to do is “convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making” (3). For example, casualties of slow violence, both human and environmental, are “most likely not to be seen, not to be counted” and when a casualty is not seen or counted, the question is less focused on how to fight that slow violence and energy (13). Instead, that same energy that could be focused on the change is turned toward how to raise awareness about that slow violence so that change can occur.

In his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Nixon adopts the term “Anthropocene Age,” and explains that it as a time beginning around 1950 to the present day when “humanity has altered the biophysical systems of Earth, not just the carbon cycle . . . but also the nitrogen cycle and ultimately the atmosphere and climate of the whole globe” (12). Nixon argues that, in this Anthropocene Age, “it becomes doubly difficult yet increasingly urgent that we focus on the toll exacted, over time, by the slow violence of ecological degradation” (12-13). This leads post-1950 humanity into an age of slow violence, which is the crux of the argument in Nixon’s book. Slow violence “occurs gradually and out of sight” or is a “violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space” (2). There is nothing flashy or eye-catching about this violence. Nixon points out that the efforts to make the various forms of slow violence more noticeable pre-9/11 suffered a setback when our television screens broadcast the “fiery spectacle of the collapsing towers” (13). He suggests that this image was “burned into the national psyche as *the* definitive image of violence” and, with that one broadcasted example, years of work toward rallying the public to work on climate change were undone (13). More importantly, the victims of slow violence, both environmental and human, are “most likely not to be seen, not to be counted” and thus they become “light-weight, disposable casualties” (13). So what are we to do to draw attention to the victims of this violence? Nixon starts the conversation and, in the process, provides us with terminology to work with in our study of these moments of slow violence. He points out that one of the most “pressing challenges of our age is how to adjust our rapidly eroding attention spans to the slow erosions of environmental violence” (8). How can we engage in a discussion of slow violence that makes any

lasting impression? Is it possible, even, to teach the concept of slow violence while instilling a sense of empathy that will outlive the classroom? And finally, once attention has been caught, how do we teach about slow violence that will enable our students to watch with discerning eyes for world events that show evidence of the lingering effects that may take days, months, and years to manifest themselves?

Giving Shape to Formless Threats

Currently, major ecological disasters only emerge in headlines on two occasions: first, when the event occurs. This is the big moment of violence—the attention-grabbing headline that for a brief moment captures everyone’s attention and evokes a strong, emotional reaction. The second occasion that these major disasters manage to get their spot in the headline is on an anniversary. This is, essentially, the moment that the corporate media “checks-in” and, rather than the potential front-page news posting, the story will be set in a follow-up format and include information on the current status of things (i.e. court cases, if any, status of the environment in the area, etc.). These events of “slow violence” are not only connected to ecological events, though. They might also engage with violence against a person or group of people, violence against a specific species, or even violence against an economy. The way media works today, both corporate and social, revolves around reporting what is immediate. They reference past events only when a significant milestone or achievement has happened. This “anniversary style” of reporting on past events allows those events to fade in the memories of the readers.

One way to teach the concept of slow violence is in the literature classroom. In order to do this, we need to engage with a text that allows the students to see and experience the violence in action and, even further, to develop empathy and an emotional investment in the outcome of the people or environment affected by this slow violence. Nixon argues that Rachel Carson's famous work, *Silent Spring*, is an excellent text to teach this concept; and while I agree that *Silent Spring* is an excellent choice, I have found that Vizenor's *Bearheart* strikingly portrays violence intermingled with rhetorical sovereignty in a way that can challenge the classroom and make a lasting impression. *Bearheart* gives "shape to formless threats," and not just any type of shape, but vivid, unusual, attention-grabbing shape (10). It does this by placing characters in a near-future dealing with problems that will resonate with students, especially those who have followed the news on the refugee crisis and/or experienced the tumultuous rises and falls of oil prices during their lifetime. *Bearheart* speaks about these issues with language that confuses, excites, and exudes an authority that is not easy to ignore.

Understanding Word Wars

Proude Cedarfair is the primary protagonist of the story—the fourth in a line of Cedarfairs who sought to preserve the cedar trees from being felled and used for fuel in a country that has run dry of oil. Vizenor describes Proude Cedarfair as "the last leader of the cedar nation," who has "avoided word wars and terminal creeds" (15). While both of these terms come into play (and are more thoroughly explored) in later episodes of the book, it is important to understand their significance here. By "word wars," Vizenor is referencing the ultimate struggle between the oral tradition, and the rich history that

accompanies that tradition, of the Native speaker and the written tradition of the European colonist. He argues that “language determines culture and the dimensions of consciousness, which is one reason tribal people were forbidden to speak their languages at federal and mission schools on reservations” (*Wordarrows* x). Vizenor is arguing that destroying language is as violent as military action. In his book *Wordarrows*, Vizenor uses a conversation between two characters, Clement Beaulieu and Marleen American Horse, to teach us about the term “word wars.” This is an example of a rhetoric of process:

“But you are a drunk, in white words you are an alcoholic, and a good one because you have lost everything, and we know that people from reservations have drinking problems in white languages. Can the words that define your problem become the cure for your problem?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Word wars.”

“What does that mean?” she asked.

“Will words change you?”

“Well, no, not to change, not words. . . .”

“Then how come you have been sitting there, smoking a hand-rolled cigarette, drinking coffee and listening to me tell you that I love you, I love you too much to deceive you. . . . This is no cure in words, answers are not cures, words are not cures, ceremonies are cures, but not oaths and promises and the bullshit language of cures. . . . These are dependencies. Word cures are like eating menus for dinner and wondering why our

children still hunger. . . . Word cures cause internal word wars. . . . Words have power when words are not over the counter cures” (43-44).

In this section, Clement is attempting to explain to Marlene the damage that can be done with the use of words as labels. Marlene is an “alcoholic,” in the words of the white man. This single, English word carries with it a multitude of baggage and, as such, can only be theoretically cured through more white words that are created in specific phrases to address the problem. But Clement understands that, by assuming this label, Marlene is surrendering a vital part of her own identity. If she assumes the white label of alcoholic, she will fall into the trap of becoming reliant on the very language that defined her problem as a problem. Clement, instead, pushes Marlene to think of words carefully, to examine the purpose and history and effect of the words she uses to define herself. Terminal creeds, of course, are intrinsically connected with this examination of language and the false ideals that are imparted through that language. Those creeds are ideologies that are unchanging, inflexible, and that, as a result, shape the individual who buys into them throughout their lifetime into also being something inflexible and unchanging. We see an example of this through Belladonna’s interactions in the episode “Terminal Creeds at Orion.” Belladonna comes face to face with the consequences of her adherence to the terminal creed of being “Indian” and the hunters and breeders who are gathered behind the Great Wall of Orion challenge her. Belladonna, a member of the Cedarfair circus, is not only believes in those creeds, she forcefully speaks on behalf of them, instructing the hunters and breeders of the “tribal values” and rules that she adheres to. These tribal values she places on the “Indian” include, among others, parents who never yell to punish but rather “use their eyes” to tell their children what they have done wrong, families that

never send their “old people to homes to be alone,” and as individuals, they do not “invade the personal bodies of others” and “do not stare at people when [they] are talking” (*Bearheart* 194-195). Belladonna is not only corrected by the group of hunters and breeders but willingly consumes the “special dessert for narcissists and believers in terminal creeds” that they give her; completely unaware that she has become “her own victim” (199).

Understanding Terminal Creeds

Cedarfair’s journey is a series of encounters with various forms of violence: the violence that affects the travelers during their journey, the violence the travelers inflict upon themselves through the enacting of various terminal creeds, and the violence of the language itself used to depict these moments. One example of all three of these types of violence occurs during the pivotal episode that Vizenor described in his interview. In “Hlastic Haces and Scoliooma Moths,” we witness an episode of extreme violence on the person of Little Big Mouse. The chapter leads up to this violence with an examination of Little Big Mouse’s character. She is described as having a “shadow of blond hair” between “white clean legs” (151). She is the picture of perfection, but her perfection is not enough for her. She grew up in a world of shrines, spirits, and dreams of magic wings that would enable her to fly “into the night across the stars” (148-149). The moths condemn her desire to appropriate their wings by telling her “you are perfect and now you want our imagination and visions for your own. . . . We are moths to survive and escape our lives. Perfect people leave so little to the poor and incomplete people in the world” (149). In this section, Vizenor uses the character of Little Big Mouse to engage in

the rhetoric of process. He situates the moths as a teacher, not just for Little Big Mouse, but for the reader. In this episode he teaches his reader what is at stake from the moth's point of view. Then he illuminates what is at risk for those who must deal with the appropriation of customs, traditions, and images. The harsh reality for the moths is that in order for Little Big Mouse to have wings she must take from them the very thing that allows them to survive. Even when they spell it out, Little Big Mouse has convinced herself that they can share their wings with her because she sees herself as one of them. In this moment, Vizenor is modeling for the reader how these conversations often take place between the marginalized and the privileged. He is highlighting the potential loss that the marginalized face when the privileged enact appropriation even when the privileged don't see their behavior as appropriative. He is showing us that motives, intentions, and how we feel about appropriation has no real-life impact on the loss and damage done by appropriation. Little Big Mouse's idealistic attitude and way of thinking fully supports her investment into a terminal creed. This episode uses a rhetoric of process to help teach the reader to think about appropriation in a different way.

For Little Big Mouse, that terminal creed is the role of the healer, the spiritualist who appropriates signs, customs, language, and gestures in order to play a role. She does not actually care for these cripples; she cares about the idea of them and wishes to heal that idea. Proude Cedarfair recognizes this, teaching in his deep voice that "we become our memories and what we believe. . . . We become the terminal creeds we speak. Our words limit the animals we would become . . . soaring through words from memories and visions" (147). However, as Little Big Mouse closes her eyes and dreams of a "world of beautiful deformities," the reality she faces brutally emerges. The "lusting cripples" are

described in a manner consistent with wild animals. They “thrust their beaks, pushed their snouts and scratched [her] perfect flesh with their claws and paws” (151). Vizenor reminds his reader here that these are “whitecripples,” once again claiming sovereignty over language to describe and place the savage creatures firmly in the mind of his readers as belonging to the very group of individuals who can lay claim to the idea of the “savage indian” (151).

The Introduction of Sovereignty in *Bearheart*

Vizenor describes *Bearheart* as being “an episodic journey obliquely opposed to western manifest destiny. . . a kind of parallel contradiction, of Indians moving south and southwest rather than west. What they’re traveling through is the ruins of western civilization, which has exhausted its petroleum, its soul” (Owens 249). Proude Cedarfair and his family have been displaced from their home in Minnesota, the “Cedarfair circus” that has been passed down through three prior generations of Cedarfairs (*Bearheart* 5). Each Proude Cedarfair maintained a personality distinct from the rest, yet the common goal of each was to protect the land they are connected to. However, Vizenor is quick to introduce the threat to this land by identifying the “nineteenth century frontier politics” favoring various interests, including those of the railroads, ‘treekillers,’ and agrarian settlers” (7). In another example of rhetorical sovereignty, these “whitepeople” often approach Cedarfair with the power of their written words (8). Thus each generation of Proude Cedarfairs finds itself at war with the federal government until, despite the watchful eye of the fourth Proude Cedarfair, the government succeeds, with the help of the elected tribal leader, Jordan Coward, in confiscating the land in order to fell the cedar

trees it contains for fuel (24). Betrayed, Proude Cedarfair attempts to claim his land as a “sovereign nation,” but ultimately fails and is forced from his home by Coward—a home that is subsequently burned while the fourth Proude Cedarfair “listened until evil and the fire had died in peace” (26, 33).

The displacement of Proude Cedarfair and his family highlights the definitive discrepancy in power between the Cedarfairs and the federal government. It also provides an opportunity to introduce the topic of sovereignty and what exactly it means—both historically and in contemporary society. The power dynamics between Cedarfair and his own elected tribal government show the lack of power and sovereign strength that that Cedarfair holds. He is displaced and has no option but to begin his journey—a journey made infinitely more difficult due to the lack of transportation caused by the current crisis. Vizenor develops a narrative of “national development” through this further revoking of sovereignty. That narrative depends on “energetically inculcated habits of imaginative limit, habits that hide from view communities that inconvenience or disturb the implied trajectory of unitary national ascent” (Nixon 151). In helping Coward, the government officials act in secret, relying on sovereignty through Coward to hide their actions. This provides those officials with deniability for the government’s actions as those same actions are being enforced through the violence, both in language and behavior, of Jordan Coward. By acting in secret, they orchestrate the removal of Proude Cedarfair by and through the authority of the tribe and its representative. The development of the new “nation-state,” one that must learn survival without the presence of petroleum, is only safe once this removal has taken place. Through the actions of Jordan Coward, Proude Cedarfair and Rosina have been divorced from their place in the

tribe and are viewed now as “surplus people;” by both the government and their own tribe. They are people who, through their removal, have become separated from any connection to the land and, in that removal, have sacrificed their claim on the cedar for the good of the new “nation-state” (151). Through this process, they suffer an act of violence that strips them of their identity in connection with the land that they had been part of for generations and also strips their identity as belonging to any sort of future envisioned by the government on both the tribal and governmental levels.

In order to understand the violence of that displacement, I intend to frame the conversation through Nixon’s description of the five main strategies used to deny right to those people living in the “hydrological zone” (163). In the case of Proude Cedarfair, the cedar circus is a place that, like a hydrological zone, is rich in the resources that the government needs. As a result, we can draw a direct connection to those five strategies used to remove the surplus people of the hydrological zones to the strategies used in the text of *Bearheart* to inflict violence on Proude Cedarfair and Rosina.

The First Strategy of Removal: The Threat of Direct Violence

The removal of Proude and Rosina from their home takes place in a series of violent actions. Nixon defines the first strategy of removal as that of “blunt threat of direct violence: forced removal at military or paramilitary gunpoint or via the barrel of a gun” (163). In order to fully understand how that moment can be reached, we must first examine the series of events that lead up to that threat of direct violence.

The first instance of violence takes place with the trespassing of government officials on Proude’s land. Proude says to Rosina that before speaking with the strangers

in “official words,” he wants to know what their securities are (20). In order to learn those insecurities, he declares he will “be a clown . . . a compassionate trickster for the afternoon” in order to avoid them (20). Proude’s trickster activities sends the male government official hurrying back down the road to the tribal center, while his female companion succeeds in pulling him back two times, but only for a moment (20-21). It is only when Proude roars from the fourth direction, the south, that both of the officials run to the “cedar ghost border of the circus” and on to the tribal center where they can confer with the “elected president of the reservation government” (20-21). This is a subversive act on the part of Proude, which is where the compassionate element comes into play. Rather than directly confronting the officials, Proude turns instead to a method that draws on the strengths of his surroundings and in turn highlights the weaknesses of the two officials.

This leads to an escalation of violence through the arrival of the elected president, Jordan Coward, who enters “the circus with harsh words” (24). Vizenor describes Coward as being a man with “bulbous purple lips” who curses and drinks and is described as a “reservation mongrel” (22-23). The introduction of Coward provides a slight pause that allows Vizenor to remind the reader that there are many kinds of Native peoples, and not to read all in the same way we are reading Proude Cedarfair. This is another example of the rhetoric of process and Vizenor’s awareness of the fact that mainstream readers must be constantly reminded to resist the temptation to read all “Indians” as “Pan-Indian.” The escalation of violence throughout the narrative, the “political and executive nonfeasance the national supplies of crude oil had dribbled to nothing” and the “political quarrels,” lead to the conclusion that all branches of the

government “were not capable of negotiating trades or developing alternative fuels” (23). The result is—and in this result we are enlightened as to why exactly Proude’s cedar is at stake here—that the government “attached half of the standing timber in the nation” (23). After this short interlude, Vizenor redirects the focus back to Jordan Coward. In spite of his dislike of the federal agents, Coward has a “need for revenge” that aligns their cause with his own. Vizenor describes his entrance into Proude’s circus as one that is accompanied with “harsh words” such as his scream of greeting: “*Anishinabewish . . . you goddamn crusading savage*” (24). With the introduction of the Anishinaabe language, Vizenor pinpoints a new level of violence. In this moment, he begins to draw out just how rampant the violence is—it is not only perpetuated by non-Natives, but even those who speak the language have bought into the “terminal creeds” and can behave in a manner that inflicts violence on a member of their own tribe. This is an uncomfortable moment because it directly highlights *victimry*. Since victimry depends entirely on the ability of the individual to lay the blame of their condition on the feet of their oppressor, it casts a Native person into that role of oppressor. Moreover, Jordan Coward directly attacks the “sacred cedar crap” and the years of tradition and beliefs that Proude’s family held, defended, and lived with in that space. Proude did not lose his land due to the actions of only white government officials; Proude was violated by his own elected tribal official—a man who, although sharing his tribal affiliation, did not share in Proude’s push for survivance.

Jordan continues his threats by attacking Cedarfair with physical harm—“you should be shot and stuffed like the goddamn bear you are”—with an intimidating “Who do you think you are scaring off the government with that goddamn bear talk and walk

shit?,” and finally, with accusations of treason and the threat of forcible removal by death: “if you are still here in the morning we will have you shot for treason” (24). This final accusation ties directly in with that first strategy of removal. There is a “blunt threat of direct violence” and a reference to the forcible removal of Proude who will die by the barrel of a gun (Nixon 163). Still, Proude refuses to leave, stating “we will not leave the dreams of sacred cedar,” and he is defended by the crows and the dogs who openly attack Jordan, covering him in “white crow shit” and pecking at him and knocking him down until he finally runs from the circus toward the reservation tribal offices (25). The support of the crows and dogs of Proude, not only in this section but also as a reoccurring theme throughout the book, emphasize the collaboration of other species with Proude’s resistance. In doing this, the trickster theme heavily engages with the ecological/environmental message being delivered. Yet, Proude is not portrayed as the stereotypical “ecological Indian” in this fight. Instead, he works with the crows and the dogs not as their protector, but rather as their partner in trickster activities. This partnership between Proude, the crows, and the dogs is in direct violation of the colonial, “manifest manners” that draws on the Christian order to “fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (*ESV*, Gen. 1.28).

The Second Strategy of Removal: An Appeal to Self-Sacrifice

While this first strategy is being realized, the second strategy is actively working alongside it. The government officials who play the “good cop” to Jordan Cowards’ “bad cop” in the routine are appealing to what they believe is a sense of honor in Proude

Cedarfair. Nixon defines the second main strategy as being the involvement of an appeal to “selective self-sacrifice” (164). He goes on to explain that this appeal puts the loss of the individual in the context of the greater good—it creates a hero who enables the nation to succeed (163). The government officials attempt to reason with Cedarfair, reminding him that he is a citizen of the country and using that status as the basis to create a bond of communal loyalty. They remind him that he lives “on this great earth in the same nation” and infer, in the process, that he owes it to that earth and nation to sacrifice his own property (26). But Proude brings sovereignty into the discussion. He points out that while Minnesota might be the place belonging to the government, people like Proude and Rosina are not citizens of that place. They are, in fact, members of the “sovereign nation” (26). Proude says: “These trees were the first to grow here, the first to speak of living on this earth . . . These trees are sovereign. We are cedar and we are not your citizen” (26). By assuming the identity of the cedar trees, Proude speaks to the sovereignty of the tribal people living on the lands long before the government had stolen and renamed those same lands under the heading of Minnesota. This recognition of sovereignty is also echoed in the interactions between Proude and the crows and dogs, as well as many other species that interact with the travelers throughout the story. These officials may wield the power of an “executive order,” but Cedarfair persists in denying the power of that printed document of manifest manners, once again bringing word wars to the front. He points out the differing authority for each of the parties involved. For the government official, authority lies in the “language of newspapers and false pictures” (26). For Proude, authority lies in the history of the land that surrounds them—the connection to the cedars through more than a hundred years of history and the deaths of those people in defending

the rights of the “sovereign trees” (26). In this process, Vizenor teaches us again through Proude’s actions what it means to wield *rhetorical* sovereignty. While the government officials speak of the cedar trees as being property and thus attainable through government seizure, Proude recognizes the sovereignty of the trees and defends that sovereignty through a denial of the “possessive voices” of the officials and a refusal to allow the word wars to interfere with the cedar’s “visions and dreams” (26).

The final act of violence in this chain of events involves the realization of Jordan Coward’s physical threat. The cajoling through personal stories is ineffective, in that it does not convince Proude to peacefully turn over the sovereign rights of the cedar nation. Instead, through a subtle manipulation of the government official, Proude succeeds in planting questions in the mind of the male official. When the male official poses the questions that Proude has inspired, his companion who points out that his words “should not be the words of a federal servant” (29). Through the influence of Proude, the male government official begins to defend Proude and Rosina to his companion: “You are beginning to sound like President Coward . . . Punishing the cedar for the values of men” (30). The male official also starts to chant, describing the beauty of the surrounding area and, in that place, both is seduced and seduces his companion into the enactment of a sexual act there in the open” (30-31). In spite of his powerful influence on the government officials, Proude still faces the threat from his own tribal member. It is only through trickery that Proude and Rosina manage to escape a gruesome death by fire. They “stuffed their bed with their shadowless shapes and built a cedar fire to last through the morning,” and in doing so, convinced Jordan Coward that they were still in the home and refusing to leave (32). In reality, however, they slip from the cabin and await the

arrival of Coward and the government officials (32). From afar, Cedarfair and Rosina hear the banging of Jordan Coward on their door echoing through the trees and the sound of his voice yelling “Burn those goddamn cowards . . . burn those cedar savages out of there” (33). One simply need imagine the banging of the door to be the sound of bullets being fired to understanding the impact of this moment of violence. In spite of the best efforts of Proude and Rosina to humanize and communicate their sovereign rights and their history, their home falls to the power of the government and the betrayal of those who have renounced sovereignty for the terminal creeds provided by that government. Yet, Proude does not succumb to the appeal for self-sacrifice as the cedar circus burns. Instead, he stands witness as “tribal leaders were not honest enough to bear the dreams” and then he turns away, leaving the cedar forest to be alone “for the first time in four generations” (33). Proude’s recognition of the betrayal from his tribal leaders speaks volumes regarding his character. The appeal to self-sacrifice would never have worked on Proude. The company he keeps would never demand that sacrifice from him and Vizenor provides his readers with evidence for this in Proude’s name. It is his pride in the cedars, his traditions, his language, and his heritage, that pushes him to find solutions that can peacefully live within the parameters of those same things. When that solution cannot be found, Proude accepts what must be accepted, bears witness to it, and looks to the future and the start of a journey that will keep his traditions, language, and heritage alive.

The Third Strategy of Removal: Diminishing Visibility

Nixon’s third strategy denies “inhabitants their rights” and, by doing so, diminishes their visibility (163). It does this by involving the “indirect violence of

euphemisms and acronym” (163). He provides the example of the World Bank’s terminology, the PAPs (Project-Affected People) as an example of a “bloodless, technocratic, deviously neutral term” to describe those “negatively affected—often doomed—by the project in question” (163). While the World Bank does not make an appearance in Vizenor’s text, Vizenor’s word wars are a reoccurring theme throughout *Bearheart*. One example of this occurs in the episode “Word Wars in Word Wards.” The start of this episode places the travelers in the little town of Bioavaricious, a town that is itself a play on words as it shows a greed for the biology of the “sick” subjects being studied at the hospital (162). At this hospital, words are being spoken and collected, gestures are studied, and an attempt at structuring language to be “all things to all people” is being made (165). The pilgrims struggle to communicate with those in uniform at this place, as the words they are speaking and the stories they are telling are foreign to the uniformed ward workers. Proude begins, after being told to keep his voice down and his hands out of the conversation, with a story of the “two people in uniforms who came to the cedar nation not willing to speak alone” (164). Once again, we are returned to the removal of Proude and Rosina from their home and, in telling the story, Proude is attempting to tell his story, unfortunately once again it falls on unhearing ears.

The response from the uniformed individuals is bureaucratic and sterile:

“What we want to know is what we hear, but this moment, all moments here at the Bioavaricious Regional Word Hospital, are recorded on audio and video tape for future examination and model testing . . . We will do studies on these few minutes later.”

“Words of wisdom,” said Double Saint.

“Government thinking,” said Pio.

“I am at a loss for words,” said Matchi Makwa. “Words cannot describe the feeling that our language is a labor of love against which we rise up and prevail in glorious voices of pride and speak about nothing . . .” (165)

Matchi Makwa’s response to the disappointing words of the two unnamed, uniformed individuals is both poignant and apropos. He speaks to a feeling of invisibility; the urge to speak a language that is “a labor of love” and still experience it being unheard yet still catalogued, studied, recorded, and examined as being something that is a relic and not a living breathing source of pride.

The travelers applaud Makwa for his speech, remarking on how good the “sound sounds” as they come from him. Still, Vizenor reiterates just how unheard the pilgrims are. The conversation that takes place with Proude, Makwa, and the unnamed officials provides Vizenor’s reader with an example of what happens when sovereignty of speech is taken from an individual. Three unnamed, uniformed individuals respond to Makwa’s speech by emphasizing that at the hospital they “find tongues in trees, books in brooks, phrases from the mouths of fish, oral literatures on the wings of insects, sermons in stone, good words here and there, words are all things to all people” (165). The immediate dismissal of Makwa’s “labor of love” and desire to bring all language together erases the individuality of each person of the pilgrim party and attempts to place them under the same heading—such as “Indian.”

The erasure of specific tribes and languages is no stranger to Vizenor, as the movement toward “Pan-Indianism” was, and still is, regularly represented in our rhetoric when speaking of Native Americans today. Native American author and activist, Vine

Deloria, Jr. defines pan-Indianism as the implication that the native man “forgets his tribal background and fervently merges with other Indians to form ‘Indianism’” (246). When the uniformed workers boldly claim “words are all things to all people” they deny the rights of the traveling party to express themselves in their own language or their “labor of love” (*Bearheart* 165). The statement that “words are all things to all people” leads to an erosion of language and the renaming of groups thus causing invisibility (165). Take, for example, the words “sovereign” and “ward.” When the dominant power in the conversation determines that “ward” is the term to be applied to modern Native peoples and tribes and, in the process, dismiss the word “sovereign,” the relationship between that dominant power doing the renaming and the tribes changes. Tribes are no longer viewed by the dominant power as being “sovereign,” as it would be defined in the English language. Instead, now tribes have moved from an independent, separate space to a space that is completely dependent upon the dominant party.

What we see in this episode of *Bearheart* is the clash between the living language of Cedarfair’s circus and the desire of outsiders to hear something that should be catalogued and studied. When, at the end of the episode, the tables are turned and two members of the traveling circus have control of the three uniformed employees, Doctor Wilde, the “tribal historian” says to Justice Pardone, the “illiterate law school graduate and tribal justice,” “Words are the meaning of living now . . . The word is where the world is at now” (78, 170-171). In this moment, Vizenor uses Wilde’s voice to remind his readers “there are no simple answers in a hospital for word wars” (171). The erosion of language and the manner through which it erases culture, names, traditions, and lives is something to be aware of, Vizenor is arguing. It’s something to fight against by

understanding that in allowing language to be manipulated, by participating in *victimry*, we are handing over our bodies to those who manipulate our words (171). Once our bodies are handed over, we allow ourselves to be erased by those who manipulate our words and thus lose visibility.

The Fourth Strategy of Removal: The “Inferiority” of the People

Nixon’s fourth and fifth strategies become more culture-focused. In the fourth strategy “the rights of those inhabiting a projected submergence zone may be dismissed on the grounds that such people are culturally inferior—or indeed lack any culture to speak of” (163). There is abundant evidence of this in Vizenor’s narrative, beginning first with the arrival of the two federal officials in the episode “Green Machine.” The “federal man” knocks on the “open door of the cabin” after remarking that it appears as if no one is home and, after calling into the cabin, looks to his partner for direction on what to do next (20). The federal woman indicates that, since the door is open, “there can be no harm in waiting inside” (20). The intrusion into the private space of the Cedarfairs is further marked by the movement of the federal woman around the inside of the cabin as she invades their space over and over again with “looking and touching personal objects with her fingertips” (20). She remarks to her partner, “These people own so little. . .there is nothing here but little shrines,” dismissing anything of cultural value to the Cedarfairs with this simple sentence (20).

Similarly, in “Freedom Train to Santa Fe” we witness Proude being shunned by his fellow pilgrims as he passes out medicine bundles to the “pentarchical pensioners” who then provide him and his companions with fare to board the train (217). An

exception is made for the pilgrims. Unlike the other families riding the train who have had to provide food and weapons, the pensioners demanded less from the pilgrims because they have a “soft spot in the old chest bone for injuns” as they also have a “little injun” in them (220). This remark is quickly followed by a reference to the power of the squaws” who know “how to make a man howl across the mountain” (220). Still, this bond does not save the pilgrims from ultimate detainment. Vizenor writes that the “pentarchical pensioners had planned in the beginning to detain the travelers as prisoners” and it was for that reason that they asked “so little fare from the pilgrims” (224-225). In a series of events that teases the reader with memories of the historical inquisitions, “charges of evil and diabolism were brought against the pilgrims” (225).

In a line of questioning brought on Rosina, New Deal Giddings, one of the new governors, announces “there will be no witches and shamans permitted in our new nation . . . Governments in the past have fallen because of evil and diabolitics . . . diabolism” (227). In spite of Rosina’s honest responses to their questioning, her words are twisted into lies to become something that they aren’t: examples of witchcraft and shamanism—evil words now used as a weapon against her. Yet, Rosina and the rest of the travelers have exhibited nothing but peaceful and earnest, if a bit misguided, actions throughout their travels and Vizenor understands in this pivotal moment that his readers will see that. He shows us, through this interview, how the misunderstanding between a heavily Christianized people and a people considered as “other” can occur. Further, we are witness to the impossible situation the “other” is placed in here. When Proude enters the room, he is informed that Rosina has “told [them] all about [his] demonic powers” when Rosina had done no such thing (228). Proude’s response to their line of questioning is

silence because, when faced with a group in power who will manipulate whatever truth you say, what other option does he have (228)?

The Fifth Strategy of Removal: The Devaluation of Culture

Finally, Nixon argues that the last strategy of removal is the annulment of “rights of those dispossessed” (164). In order to do this, those in power must question what “counts as a culture” and who belongs and retains the right to remain in a space that has been “overridden by the legal logic of private property as self-development” (164). This, Nixon contends, all ties back to the “larger narrative of national development” and is crucial in tying all five strategies together. By becoming “uninhabitants” or “residual presences,” the displaced communities have lost all rights they may have had to even be remembered for their place in the land.

In Vizenor’s narrative, this sentiment exhibits itself in three ways during the opening displacement of Proude. First, we are introduced to President Coward’s dreams of “evil revenge” in which he imagines the “cedar nation being cut into little sticks and burned in the federal offices of the bureau of public remorse” (23). Once burned, these sticks become “literal presences” of the lives of the cedar nation and, in particular, the life of Proude Cedarfair. The second way in which this fifth strategy is enacted is through the wiping out of the official right of Proude Cedarfair to inhabit his own land. The officials open a “plain green federal envelope” and recite “the executive order attaching the cedar trees” (25). Vizenor takes effort to describe the uniformity and sterile nature of this removal in contrast to Coward’s plans for “evil revenge.” He writes, “first the federal man read a phrase in official federalese and then in turn the muscular woman read a

phrase. Their voices differed in timber and volume but the tone and gestures in their speech was the same” (25). Cedarfair protests against this treatment, telling the two officials that he will not “listen to you speaking as an institution” (26). But his protest is in vain, as the woman official pushes him further, arguing, “the government will have every citizen understand that half the national trees are being protected as a federal resource” (26). Third, and finally, the male official addresses Cedarfair and instructs him to understand the “meaning of being a citizen” (26). Proude refuses, arguing that the place is a “sovereign” place and emphasizes that “we,” being himself and the cedars, are not citizens (26). But Proude’s fight to save the cedars is in vain and he and Rosina become “uninhabitants” of their sovereign land through the “fine white flames of evil violence and thoughts of revenge” from Jordan Coward. Yet, in spite of the powers, both government and tribal, working against them, Proude and Rosina make the choice to leave the cedars on their own terms and maintain their sovereignty over their own bodies. This is emphasized a short while into their journey when Proude and his companions hear over the radio the order that “all citizens will be issued bionic residential identification cards” and that “no citizens will be permitted to travel without government authorization” (48). Proude simply states “we are not citizens” and the travelers continue their journey, free from the “government restrictions and regulations” on travel that is being imposed on the rest of the nation (48).

In “Freedom Train to Santa Fe” we are also treated to a outline of rules for the new government that closely echoes these five strategies of Nixon’s. When Proude and his companions board the freedom train and are taken prisoner they are exposed to a new

nation and a new government. This new government's "reorganization plan" is "divided into five memorial parts" as follows:

The pentad plan begins with rigid rules for pure living. The second part calls for sacrifice and obedience. The third part explains the nature of divine rule. The fourth part charts the methods of national economic reorganization and the last part structures the future paradigms of the universe under the divine power of the pentarchical pensioners (218).

In these rules we can see some of the structure of Nixon's five strategies beginning to form. Nixon's first strategy involves the threat of direct violence and in this new society being created Vizenor is speaking to a similar concept: the "rigid rules of pure living" (218). In order to enforce those rigid rules, it is reasonable to assume that there must be some kind of governmental influence in enforcing them and it is a small leap to understanding that may come under the heading of a threat or threats of "direct" legal violence.

There is a striking similarity in Nixon and Vizenor's second strategy/rule. The appeal to self-sacrifice and "call for sacrifice and obedience" seem to be a logical step following the pre-cursor strategy/rule. At the start of his journey, Proudé is called upon by the government officials to offer his sovereign land in sacrifice in order to be a good and dutiful citizen and here, at the end of his journey, the same demand is being made on him from a new and different government. This new government, one that has adopted "divine rule" as its third rule, works with Nixon's strategy of making the displaced invisible. Divine rule strips all rights and privileges from a people except those that the ruler or monarch has deemed to grant them. In the fourth rule of reorganization we are

confronted with the idea of that which was there was outdated or in need of modification. Thus, with reorganization, the old ways, peoples, traditions are deemed inferior or lacking and are replaced by the new national economy. Finally, the fifth rule of the new government is ruled over by the pentarchy under their divine power (218). Once again, this divine power permits the rulers to reorganize, strip people of rights and privileges, and do all of this under the simultaneous threat of violence and appeal to sacrifice. Proude, in spite of all of the efforts made throughout his journey, finds himself at the end in a place that remarkably resembles where he began.

Yet, there still remains hope – for once again, Proude refuses to renounce his sovereignty and through escape, joins up with “hundreds of tribal people” who “were moving across the river into the mountains” (235). In the end, Proude leaves all but one other pilgrim, and gives Rosina a note, along with a “pouch of cedar incense” and a “bundle of sage” (240). On the note, he writes to “follow the clown crows to the window on the winter solstice sunrise. Listen to the crows and the bears ha ha ha haaaa” (240).

Proude’s journey and refusal to concede his sovereignty throughout the story is Vizenor’s way of modeling what survivance looks like. Proude seems to lose everything; yet, his journey is one of ultimate redemption—in losing everything around him, he still retains his pride and his sovereignty and never did he succumb to the urge to fall victim.

Conclusion

While Native literary criticism that relies upon the concept of the trickster is, and will continue to be, a strong force in Native literary criticism and the Native Literature classroom, I argue that it is just as important that we introduce the theory of rhetorical

sovereignty as another key component of the way that we interact with Native authors and their texts. It is important that we give names to what is happening in those texts and that we identify not only what the author is trying to impart through their stories, but also to identify the methods through which they are doing so. All of these insights must be tied back to sovereignty, both tribal and rhetorical. In *Bearheart* we see how it is exhibited and also show the context of that sovereignty is in literature, in speech, in history, and how it manifests in the daily lives of Native peoples today. In the introduction to a series of essays published recently, Lisa King, Rose Gubele, and Joyce Rain Anderson argue that indigenous epistemologies “might even suggest a way out of the colonial stories that have blocked vision for so long, privileging some rhetorical storytelling traditions and silencing others” (4). I see this happening with the silencing of Vizenor in the classroom, whether it be through a reduction of teaching that focuses solely on the violence being portrayed in the story while ignoring the power behind the way that story is being told, or through a refusal to engage with his rhetoric for various reasons. Those reasons might include the difficulty the students have with understanding, the issues that might arise due to its disruptive tendencies, or even by the easing into a teaching that focuses on solely the trickster model while ignoring the complex layering that is happening through and with that process. Ultimately, there are a number of ways in which *Bearheart* can be taught that bring awareness to different styles of writing that challenge our students pre-conceptions on what literature can and should look like.

King, et. al., emphasize that teaching “survivance” is “an act of recognition: acknowledging the ongoing presence and work of indigenous peoples, particularly the way indigenous communities negotiate language and rhetorical practice in a paracolonial

world” (7-8). *Survivance* is the key word here; how better to teach rhetorical sovereignty as survivance than by using a text of the author who is credited with the actual term? Furthermore, in teaching Vizenor’s texts, we are introducing students to the text as written by a Native author who understands that a rhetoric of process is a necessity in order for his readers to follow what is happening. Vizenor takes the time in his writing to explain, to teach, and to explore his acts of rhetorical sovereignty through dialogue and interludes. With *Bearheart*, one episode, or a small series of connected episodes, are devoted to exploring one key idea, phrase, or instance of violence. Each of those episodes can be then used, in turn, to create a lesson that focuses not only on teaching through disruption, but can also be used and framed in a way that emphasizes the importance of sovereignty and what it means for Native peoples.

Works Cited

- Armstrong, Meg. "Buried in Fine White Ash": Violence and the Reimagination of Ceremonial Bodies in "Winter in the Blood" and "Bearheart." *American Indian Quarterly* 21.2 (1997): 1-30. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.
- Blaeser, Kimberly M. *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1996. Print.
- Blair, Elizabeth. "Text as Trickster: Postmodern Language Games in Gerald Vizenor's *Bearheart*." *ELUS* 20.4 (Winter 1995): 75-90. Web.
- English Standard Version Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bible Publishers, 2008. Print.
- Deloria, Philip J. *Playing Indian*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1999. Print.
- Deloria, Vine, Jr. "A Redefinition of Indian Affairs." *Custer Died for Your Sins*. New York: Macmillan, 1988.
- Jalalzai, Zubeda. "Tricksters, Captives, and Conjurors: The 'Roots' of Liminality and Gerald Vizenor's 'Bearheart.'" *American Indian Quarterly* 23.1 (Winter 1999): 25-44. Web.
- Keady, Maureen. "Walking Backwards into the Fourth World: Survival of the Fittest in 'Bearheart.'" *American Indian Quarterly* 9.1 (Winter 1985): 61-65. Web.
- King, Lisa, Rose Gubele, and Joyce Rain Anderson. *Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story: Teaching American Indian Rhetorics*. "Introduction—Careful with the Stories We Tell: Naming *Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story*." Boulder: UP of Colorado, 2015. Print.
- Lyons, Scott Richard. "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?" *College Composition and Communication* 51.3 (2000): 447-468. Web.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA:

Harvard UP, 2011. Print.

Owens, Louis. "Afterword." *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*. Minneapolis: U of

Minnesota P, 1990. Print.

Rigel-Cellard, Bernadette. "Doubling in Gerald Vizenor's *Bearheart*: The Pilgrimage

Strategy or Bunyan Revisited." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 9.1

(1997): 93-114. Print.

Vizenor, Gerald. "Aesthetics of Survivance: Literary Theory and Practice." *Survivance:*

Narratives of Native Presence. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2008. Print.

---. *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990. Print.

---. "Manifest Manners: The Long Gaze of Christopher Columbus." *boundary 2* 19.3

(1992): 223-235. Web.

---. Personal Interview. November 6, 2015.

---. *Wordarrows*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1978. Print.